

'Warmongering'

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Democrats have had some success in the past year chipping away at White House misinformation about Iraq. Misleading data has been countered with accurate figures and the curtains shrouding Iraq's political future are slowly being drawn back. But the president still has the power to mislead the public from his bully pulpit. And his deception doesn't seem to stop with Iraq.

Even in the current climate of suspicion, the White House is still very powerful at setting the agenda for the nation and at influencing how certain circumstances are viewed. A recent dip in violence in Iraq offers the perfect example. The president claims that his "surge" is responsible for the decrease in violence in the country. But he conveniently forgets that the killings only began to decline two months after the surge reached its peak.

Among the many factors that contributed to the decrease in violence was an August 29 ceasefire called by Moktada al-Sadr, one of Iraq's top Shiite leaders. The two months following the ceasefire, killings dropped by half. But rather than attributing the decrease in violence to the many forces at play in Iraq, the president conveniently claimed the success as his own.

If nothing else, the White House is impressive in its tenacity. When one strategy falls apart, they're quick to move onto their next doomed idea. We have leapfrogged from weapons of mass destruction to "Mission Accomplished" to the more recent troop surge, glossing over not only the failures of each previous strategy but ignoring the many other catastrophes that have popped up along the way.

From the stunning short-sightedness in planning for the occupation of Iraq (a country the size of California and nearing its population) to the human rights abuses at Abu Ghraib prison and Guantanamo, the failures have been legion. But the White House just keeps plugging along. With close to 4,000 Americans killed and \$600 billion squandered, the president shows no signs of slowing down. In fact, he is now asking for another \$200 billion to sustain his war, a war the public is overwhelmingly against.

Even more alarming, we have seen a drastic increase in anti-Iran rhetoric coming from the White House over the past several months, hinting at the president's desire to rush into yet another war in the Middle East. The ongoing bickering between the White House and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has been simmering for a long time now, with occasional gurgles of activity. But the conflict reached a full boil earlier this month when U.S. intelligence agencies said that Iran isn't working to develop nuclear weapons, and hasn't since 2003.

This National Intelligence Estimate was released just weeks after President Bush declared in no uncertain terms that Iran's nuclear weapons program was leading us to World War III. Either the president is purposely misleading the public to advance his own agenda of aggression or he is uninformed on even the most important issues facing our country. I'm not sure which possibility is more frightening.

Even after the report was made public, the president didn't budge. "The NIE doesn't do anything to change my opinion about the danger Iran poses to the world," Bush said at a press conference. Translation: The goods we wanted to plant on Iran didn't stick, but we're still going to prosecute them. Sticking to one's convictions can be a wonderful trait, but obstinacy in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary can be precarious.

If you consider the president's predicament, the reasoning for his actions becomes a little more clear. His legacy will be defined in blood, that much is a given. At this point, he seems to be grasping at straws in the hope that at least some success will emerge from our nation's losses. Maybe he realizes Iraq is a lost cause and is now moving onto more impressive conquests. Whatever his goal, it's also clear that Congress will not stand idly by.

Congressional Democrats are being placed in a strange position, trying to save the president from himself. Whether pressing for an end to the war in Iraq or arguing against the president's bellicose speechifying on Iran, Democrats are standing up to his aggression. If the president won't listen to the voice of the nation, maybe he'll listen to the voice of Congress. And trust me, Democrats won't back down from this fight.